

## **HERTFORD COLLEGE'S APPROACH TO ROMANTIC, INTIMATE AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS**

This policy applies to all teaching, research, administrative and domestic staff of the College, including stipendiary and non-stipendiary lecturers. It also includes students employed by the College. Henceforward, all references to 'staff' in this policy refer to staff as defined in this paragraph. All references to 'students' includes both undergraduate and graduate students following a degree course within the University; it also includes applicants for admission to the University, and any students of other academic establishments hosted at the College.

All staff (as defined in paragraph 1) are bound by this policy, irrespective of whether the relationship takes place within College or elsewhere. It covers face-to-face actions, as well as those which take place through other media such as emails, letters, telephone conversations, social networking sites, text messages etc.

This policy operates alongside, and is not intended in any way to limit or override, the College's general Harassment Policy and Procedure.

It is impossible to envisage all circumstances in which a romantic, intimate and/or sexual relationship might arise, and therefore it is also impossible to impose a blanket ban on such relationships. Nor does the College wish to infringe Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to private life. Nonetheless in the view of the College romantic, intimate or sexual relationships between staff and students can blur the lines between the personal and the professional, and will raise issues concerning abuse of power, conflicts of interest and breach of trust. Such relationships can disrupt the teaching and learning environment in unpredictable ways.

Therefore, in line with the University's policy, the College strongly advises staff not to enter into a romantic intimate or sexual relationship with students, particularly those for whom they have a professional responsibility within College. Professional responsibility includes, but is not limited to, teaching, advising, supervision, managerial, administrative and pastoral oversight. This advice, and this policy, applies irrespective of whether the student does not appear to object, appeared to give consent, gave consent or even instigated the relationship.

The College recognizes that the degree to which such relationships raise questions concerning abuse of power, conflicts of interest and breach of trust will vary. For example, a relationship between a graduate student employed by the College as a library assistant and another graduate student will not normally pose any such problem.

As such, any part-time or temporary staff roles undertaken by students are exempt from this policy PROVIDING the role being performed does not include any responsibilities for the welfare or organisation of other students (examples – library assistant, MCR postal officer). In cases where such responsibilities DO EXIST, this policy SHALL apply to those roles, but ONLY in respect of relationships with students within the scope of that responsibility

(examples – Admissions helpers and applicants, Residential Assistants and International programmes guests).

At the other end of the scale, a relationship between a tutor or lecturer with an undergraduate student for whom they have teaching or pastoral responsibilities raises such issues to an intolerable degree, and are wholly unacceptable. Such cases will be regarded as gross misconduct under the College's Disciplinary processes.

Other possible relationships may fall between these two ends of the scale, and it may be difficult for either the member of staff or the student concerned to immediately grasp what conflicts of interest could arise or what other arrangements within the College might be affected. In order to prevent such difficulties, where a personal relationship may infringe on the professional relationship that should exist between staff and students, it is the duty of the member of staff to report that relationship as soon as possible. In the case of academic staff they should report it to the Senior Tutor; in the case of non-academic staff they should report it to the Bursar. Cases involving either the Senior Tutor or Bursar should be reported to the Principal. Failure to report such relationships shall also be regarded as gross misconduct.

If a student's behaviour suggests romantic or sexual interest in a staff member, then it is the responsibility of such staff to draw this to the attention of either the Senior Tutor or the Bursar as set out above. This prevents the original staff member from becoming vulnerable. Such behaviour may fall within the remit of the College's Harassment Policy.

In the case where a newly appointed member of staff has a pre-existing relationship with a student, that member of staff should disclose the relationship to the Senior Tutor or Bursar. Pre-existing relationships involving either the Senior Tutor or Bursar should be reported to the Principal.

The College acknowledges that in implementing this process it may receive sensitive personal data and data of a confidential nature pertaining to members of staff and students, and shall ensure that all such data is handled, processed and stored in accordance with the College's legal obligations in this regard. The College's privacy notice is available at: <https://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/privacy>.

All staff have a personal responsibility to ensure that their behaviour is not contrary to this policy. All Hertford College members are encouraged to reinforce the maintenance of a College environment that promotes the highest professional and ethical standards.

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